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ABSTRACT

This document records the reactions of the Brazilian author/educator Paulo Freire to the questions: (1) what should educators do when the people with whom they work are not interested in the ideas of dialogical analysis and participatory decision making?; (2) what should educators do when they encounter hostility from people who feel that a dialogical and participatory process would threaten the status quo?; and (3) do educators have any right to get involved in a process of transformation in another culture? These questions stemmed from a 1982 project intended to increase African farmers' understanding of their own cooperative marketing system and to raise their level of participation in management of the cooperatives. Freire's answers are summarized as follows. Dialogue with others is necessary to the act of knowing because knowing takes place in human, cultural, and historical space. First, educators have to respond to the group, answering their expectations. They must become educators who give knowledge when asked, but also challenge students about their expectations for the knowledge they are demanding. Educators must understand why people do not want dialogue. They should promote dialogue between different participants, for each to defend his/her position. When they debate, they are accepting dialogue. Educators' tactics, developed in response to the situation confronted in the field rather than at the university, must be totally consistent with their strategy, their dream. Because one was born in one society does not prevent him/her from going to other cultures. The first thing one has to do there is to listen to the voice that is speaking. The second is to listen. The third is to discover that one day it is impossible to speak to others without listening to them, too. (23 references) (CML)

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"Dialogue is Not a Chaste Event."

Comments by Paulo Freire on issues in participatory research

Compiled by Paul Jurmo

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Compiled by

Paul Jurmo

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DIALOGUE IS NOT A CHASTE EVENT: Comments by Paulo Freire on Issues in Participatory Research *is a publication of the Center for International Education, School of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.*

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This booklet offers a candid glimpse of Paulo Freire's thought in action as he reacts to specific issues raised in a field experience. The case is one of a nonformal education program in Africa that includes an attempt to encourage participation of villagers and lower level staff members in evaluating and planning the project. This effort runs into problems which in turn pose questions for the practitioner. How do you deal with a lack of interest in participation on the part of the villagers or staff? What about the resistance of authorities to real participation and its implications? How ethical is it for outsiders to intervene in the affairs of others? As a project member describes the program setting and poses such dilemmas which faced them, Freire responds to each one. His reflections typically start with conceptual or interpretive dimensions of the issue but then proceed to the practical level of "what to do?"

The exchange took place on February 23, 1984, at the Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts. We have decided to publish these selected proceedings from that three hour session because the issues addressed are typical and critical ones, not only in participatory research or evaluation but also in participatory - programs or community development. Educators, researchers or community developers, whether working in the United States or abroad, might all be interested in what Freire has to say when these particular issues are posed. Some readers already familiar with Freire's writings will be intrigued by the style and flow of his impromptu oral expression. Those less familiar (see the bibliography at the end of the booklet) will be able to see ways in which conceptual considerations may be applied to a specific experience in the field.

The visit that brought Paulo Freire from Brazil to the University for three weeks in February was arranged by a planning group in the Education and Sociology departments, and was the first of a projected series of similar visits in the coming years. The Center for International Education, however, has had an intermittent intellectual if not personal relationship with Freire over the past 15 years. His Pedagogy of the Oppressed inspired much of the approach taken in the Center's rural nonformal education project in Ecuador in the early nineteen seventies, and components of other field projects since then. Center members, who come from diverse national backgrounds and typically have had a significant amount of previous field experience, have individually experimented with dialogical education in Latin America, Africa, Asia and even in Western Massachusetts. Several have also written about Freirian ideas from differnt vantage points. Many of them are committed to the ideas which are embodied in Freire's writings.

In such endeavors the Center and its members have not always clearly understood or applied Freire's ideas and intentions, have not always been fully cognisant of his basic assertion that every educational act is a political act. Even with a clear reading, the implications of his thought and example take one to uneasy frontiers: living and sharing with the oppressed; the risk and responsibility of violent repression and reaction; and the unfashionably soft values of love, faith and hope. Then there is the impinging world. Center members trying to evolve and implement kindred ideas in the field know only too well the tensions between an ideology of bottom-up empowerment through dialogue and a world of top-down authority lines, funding and habits of thought. Not the least of which are the inconsistancies we are all heir to!

Whatever the debate over contradictions in those using Freirian ideas, and in Freire himself, the stimulus of his example and moral-political stance has often produced movement along new and creative lines.

Why dialogue and participatory research in this session? Coinciding with Freire's visit, I was starting a new seminar at the Center on "Alternative Research Strategies and Skills." The initial purpose was to examine paradigms and cases in which the research process involves and empowers people rather than only uses them as a source of information to be conveyed to others. Included in these paradigms and cases were those in which action was a more intimate part of the research. Through this inquiry, and a consideration of qualities and skills of observing, listening or dialogue needed to carry out such alternatives, it was hoped that participants could have a basis for making decisions about new purposes and approaches in their own work in education. Freire's conceptual-

ization of dialogue - an interactive process through which humans reflect and analyze, become able to name and understand their situation in the world and hence to act on it and transform it - was a natural starting point. Marrying reflection and action, we acted to invite Freire to join us in this seminar and reflect on dialogue with us.

A note on how the session came to be organized the way it was. After reading Freire's publications, looking at Freire-inspired case studies and comparing ideas with our own experience, the seminar developed a series of questions that we felt needed to be examined more carefully. With these in mind, we considered alternatives of how best to use the sessions with Freire. The decision to engage him in a dialogue around a few real problems encountered in a field experince was based on a sense that dealing with a few central issues would be more productive than with our previous list. It was also influenced by past experience in conferences with Freire which were often plagued by multiple agendas, scattered questioning and abstractions. We asked Paul Jurmo, a Center member who had recently returned from one and a half years working in an African rural adult education program, to present some problems he or his team encountered in trying to implement their version of a dialogical approach. Consequently, the session began with Jurmo giving an oral summary of the context of the case and what was attempted (a written synopsis had been handed out previously), and then posing the first critical issue. Paulo responded to Paul, commenting on the issue and speculating on how he might have dealt with it. This cycle was repeated around two more issues. The list of questions developed by the seminar were on the wall, and included the three posed by Jurmo. Other questions were subsequently brought into less structured and informal exchanges with Freire over refreshments.

The Paulo-Paul exchange, which is our concern here, was therefore both structured and open. We wanted to know not only what Freire had to say about some troubling issues, but also how he would go about advising the practitioner. So as the overall inquiry was a joint one, in this one-on-one exchange Freire in effect was given points to start from and come back to in his own way. In the process he touched upon a number of sub-topics:

Meaning of dialogue and the act of knowing
Indigenous ways of knowing
Directiveness and manipulation
Why those "at the top" resist dialogue
Tactics in the context of strategy
The educator as politician
Motives for going to another culture
Unlearning about another culture
The need to listen

Here, the presentation of the case and specific issues by Paul Jurmo are paraphrased and set in italics. Excerpts of the comments by Paulo Freire are basically the words and sequence of a transcript from a tape of the class session. Occasionally connecting words have been added to clarify the flow, and in this sense Freire's comments are also paraphrased. For those who are not familiar with writings by Freire, or would be interested in selected publications related to Freire's thought, the bibliography included at the end of this booklet should prove useful.

Center for
International Education
Amherst, Massachusetts

David Kinsey
January, 1985

In the summer of 1982 I started work as an adult education advisor to a farmer co-op education program in Africa. The program's purpose was to increase farmers' understanding of their own co-operative marketing system and also raise the level of participation in the management of the co-ops.

Many of the farmers had asked to be taught enough arithmetic to be able to read the scales on which their crops were weighed for sale and the receipts which were issued to them. The farmers had enough reason to mistrust the marketing agents and learning how to read the scales would be a useful tool in securing one aspect of their livelihood.

The program had gotten off to a good start with enthusiastic reception by villagers and dedicated extension workers. I observed that as time went on, however, the farmer participants and the extension work instructors tended to wait for direction and supplies from the centralized civil service headquaters, which in turn were often unable or unwilling to give their support. Field level learners and facilitators thus tended to "sit and wait" rather than see the program as their own, something they could bend or shape and make succeed despite lack of support "from the top". With some like-minded co-workers, I began implementing a dialogical aspect in the education program by introducing new methods in the village numeracy classes which emphasized relating the basic material to everyday situations. Through such exercises, the farmers would be able to see how they could use their education to improve their day to day lives. Also we made an attempt to de-centralize the management of the program to help foster a feeling of control among the village extension workers and other lower level staff of the project.

These changes initially met with relatively good response from the farmers and the extension workers, but gradually there emerged a growing resistance from the top of the management structure. Our requests for moral and logistical support were often ignored and eventually I was told by a key administrator that he had no need for group decision making. I was allowed to stay with the program in a lame duck role for my final four months there, but most of the changes I and my colleagues had worked for were not implemented.

I think some background to the situation might be useful as well. About one year before my arrival there had been an attempted coup d'etat led by a charismatic, self-styled Marxist-Leninist. This rebellion had been quickly put down with the aid of a neighboring army. There was an initial mass arrest of many people suspected of being involved with the planning of the coup and the official disbanding of a few opposition parties. Since then there are still occasional arrests made and this all leads to a stifling of public criticism of the present government and its supporters. The people of this country are generally traditional, agricultural based village dwellers. In the modern sectors in the city there is a strong pro-west bias in both culture and economy and a hierarchy of government decision makers. Age and apparent 'paper qualifications' are the determining factors in this hierarchy. In the more traditional villages however, decision making is more participatory in nature. Even so, implementing dialogue in the village classes was not often easy.

As we tried to promote dialogue among villagers or lower staff members and engage their participation in managing their coop education activities, we sometimes confronted a lack of interest in such reflection and decision-making. We speculated that there might be a number of reasons for this. One such reason might have been the relatively foreign idea of people from lower strata of the society entering into dialogue, let alone decision making, about a "government" program. We were thus confronted with the question:

> *What do we do when the people with whom we work don't show interest in the ideas of dialogical analysis and participatory decision making?*

We first need a critical understanding of dialogue. If we don't understand the meaning of dialogue and the role of dialogue in the process of knowing, we risk taking dialogue as a kind of magical instrument with which we maybe can fight against the traditional way of teaching. The question is not teaching. The question is knowing.

What does it mean to know? Knowing is a permanent human process, not an individual event but a social one, an historical one, a cultural one. It becomes interesting, for example, when I am alone in my study in Sao Paulo and I am trying to know, to make research. It is a dialectical act. Apparently I am by myself but I am not alone. First, because the act with which I am involved is not just my own. It has been shaped by the social acts with which I have been involved.

In examining this act of knowing, we've reached the nature of the event of knowing. It is not a mere technique to be applied. It is also not a favor which we grant to the students. Dialogue with others is necessary to the act of knowing.

The act of knowing does not take place in the air. On the contrary, it takes place in the human space, cultural space, historical space. The act of knowing is not neutral. It is impossible to know neutrally. We have to be aware of the political dimensions of the act of knowing. We also have to be aware of the political consequences of the act of knowing. Knowing is not merely to speak about reality. On the contrary, knowing is to try to go into the intimacy of reality in order to grasp its internal movement. The internal movement of reality has to do with the understanding of contradictions of reality. Grasping the contradictions means to touch problems of power, the interests of power.

From the point of view of the power establishment, their interest with respect to an educational program of this type is another one altogether. For me, when you confront a situation like this most of the people you are dealing with are conditioned by the traditional way of teaching. Nevertheless, part of them accepts something apparently new. The other part of them does not accept it for different reasons, sometimes the pressure to get a "better" life for themselves. Sometimes they feel that if they try to better understand reality, they are wasting their time. They would prefer to give up their knowledge rather than use their time seeking knowledge through patient dialogue with others. We have this kind of situation at the universities where you must have thousands of students asking to 'eat' knowledge. (laughter) Yes! I had it at _____ University when I taught there. "Give me food!", as knowledge. It's an old ideology scraped up all over the world.

You could have different ways of confronting this type of situation which nevertheless can be magical. I will not say "I do this, I do that." I have however had situations like this before.

First, I think that you have to respond to the group, answering the expectations of the group. Then you must become banking educators at that point. When they ask you to give knowledge as food you have to give it. But by starting this process, you have to begin to challenge them. Even if it means that you have just five minutes, you begin to challenge them about their expectations. You ask them, "What are your reasons for asking this?" By so doing you are again returning to a critical understanding of the situation. You are trying to enable them to understand their request.

You could then go deeper into this kind of dialogue with them as you see fit. They can begin to analyze their ideology, for example. It's not necessary to speak explicitly about ideology. But they will begin to understand that there are some things which they are not seeing and touching, nevertheless reaching, which have conditioned them to act as they do. It is a matter of understanding society, and you could talk about the traditions in Africa, which is also a valid way of helping them to understand their situation.

In a country with an oral memory, there are necessarily those in the group who have a vast knowledge because of their age, because in those countries age means library. You see that? Yes! An African man my age. Do you realize the quantity of books an African man of my age has? Here in the body, not just in the memory. In the body. One of the jobs which a community in such a culture has for old people is the role of teaching history, tradition, knowledge. In order to do that, an old man sits down here, and over here a group of young people listen to him. By telling his stories in this way, he produces the history of the culture. In that culture, this is the way to get knowledge.

But suddenly a white man arrives and says, "No, the question is that of dialogue!" (laughter). In some way you have to go into the intimacy of the culture and then come back from them in a critical way, which nevertheless must not kill their beautiful tradition. You see? I think that all of these things are beautiful and complicated.

But I don't say that you have committed any kind of mistake because the people did not accept your ideas for dialogical education. I think that what you have to do is to first know better the reasons why the people did not want it. And secondly, you also have to be aware that sometimes we naively universalize our own point of view to everything else. We think that we are the center of everything, we don't think of the others who also are centers.

I am not saying that it is hypocrisy from us to do this. Maybe a very puritanical man or woman would say, "You are doing something deceptive. It's a kind of trap. A manipulation." But I judge from my point of view that it is impossible to have education without directiveness. This is not necessarily manipulation. I make a distinction between directiveness and manipulation. Right now in this discussion which has been organized around certain agreed-upon questions is a good example of directiveness. Because you are not neutral, you have to react. I know very well why I am here. I don't need to say why, but I know.

Another thing to do in response to people who don't show support for the concept of dialogue in education would be to promote dialogue between different participants, for each one to defend their position. Say, "Okay, let's have an exercise: five or six here who don't like a particular position and seven over here who do like this position. The exercise for tomorrow is; two groups have to defend, to debate, their positions. Then today, maybe, you can meet to plan your strategy and presentation." When they come back together to debate they will have in effect accepted coming back in dialogue with each other.

During our efforts in dialogical education and the development of active participation, it was apparent that the upper level authorities were not supporting these efforts, and eventually resisted and even attacked them. We came to feel that those "at the top", while unfamiliar with the idea and its rationale, did in fact understand the political implications of involving lower-status citizens and civil servants in analytical inquiry and feared a challenge to the traditional way of running the society. So in effect we were confronted with the question:

> *What do we do when we encounter hostile reactions from the people who feel that a dialogical and participatory process would threaten the status quo?*

Yes, "at the top", we know about the top! (laughter). Now look, once again we are dealing with a political question. If we take dialogue as a technique, we can think that there is a certain resistance to dialogue. But the fact is that these people at the top are not reacting against dialogue. It has nothing to do with dialogue. It is instead a political question. They are resisting the possible participation of the masses of the people in the political process. This is what they don't want, because they are atheistic people. They are reactionary people. What interests them is to preserve the control upon the people.

But then you come and say, "Oh no, but look, it's so beautiful (laughter) that the people begin now to think of participating in the evaluation of things that are being done." You are threatening them. Why? It's very easy. In this country that we are talking about the officials of the government

live very well. They get good salaries because they belong to the petite bourgeoisie of the country. This petite bourgeoisie got power not by being interested in wanting to change the country. The liberation - the independence - of this context meant just to leave one stage of colonialism and start a new one, a new colonialism. And when the people - like in Mozambique, like in Angola, like in Guinea Bissau, like in Cape Verde, like in Sao Tome - try to overcome colonialism without falling into new colonialism, the question is absolutely different. Because it is impossible to make this kind of overcoming without the people. Without the people you can easily be neo-colonialistic. But without the people it's impossible to make transformation, radical transformation, revolutionary transformation.

Then, for example, a project will come to the community and they bring schools, but they are bad schools. They bring some kind of advising in agriculture [and] some economists trained outside Africa, idealogically shaped as petite bourgeoisie. They come and bring with them the programs for production according to the interests of some bureaucrats in the Ministry of Agriculture in the capital. But they never ask the peasants about what to produce or for what or for whom. Never! Then the evaluation of their actions has to be done, but by themselves. Never with the people, because if they invite the people to evaluate, the people will begin to say it was a bad program. Also, when the evaluation is controlled by these bureaucrats, it is safe. Allowing the people to express themselves would have a snowballing effect. If you permit the people today to critisize the rural extension program, tomorrow the people will discuss the duties of the president, and that would be too much. It would be an impossible situation for them.

I insist on telling you, it's not a question of dialogue. It's a question of participatory democracy, not bourgeois democracy. They (the ministerial elite) are rejecting democracy. They are defending a separitist kind of freedom. Their freedom, class freedom, group freedom, whatever the name. Never the freedom of the people. This is not what they are striving for.

And your situation is a very difficult one. Maybe you were not put in jail because you are an American citizen. If you were a Brazilian, you would be considered a subversive - like Paulo Freire (laughter). You see? Now, what to do?

Now I don't know what you must do. The only thing I know is that first you have to discover what to do there under those circumstances. And secondly, in order for us to know what to do, we must be very clear concerning something - the relationship between tactics and strategy. Strategy is, as I understand it, the space in which I have my dream, my political dream, the objective of my life. It does not mean thay my dream stays eternally, permanently, like it was in the beginning.

Tactics on the other hand are different. They concretize the dream. We have to be very consistent between tactics and strategy. It means that I cannot have tactics of a rightist man in order to concretize the dreams of a leftist.

For me it's tremendously absurd. It is for me something that we have lots of. We make a beautiful speech in the streets to the working class - revolution, Marxism - and the next day in the seminar we stop the students from asking questions. We do this on behalf of the revolution because we already know what must be done. The students have to follow me. I think - no, I am conviced - that this is a tremendous contradiction. I remember Guevara wrote about that when he said "No contradictions between the means and the objectives." He was very demanding about that.

But soon you discover that your dream is not exclusively a pedagogical one. You discover from the beginning that it has political implications as it is clear that the reactions of the people at the top are not pedagogical reactions. They are political reactions. Then you will also discover that if you go on without some caution, you will get the program stuck. I know that for you as an American in Africa, the question is not to lose your job. You are not a national there. This is not the question for you.

For me the question for you is in the project itself. If you believe in the project, the question is how to avoid having the project crushed quickly because they know that you are being critical and causing others to do the same.

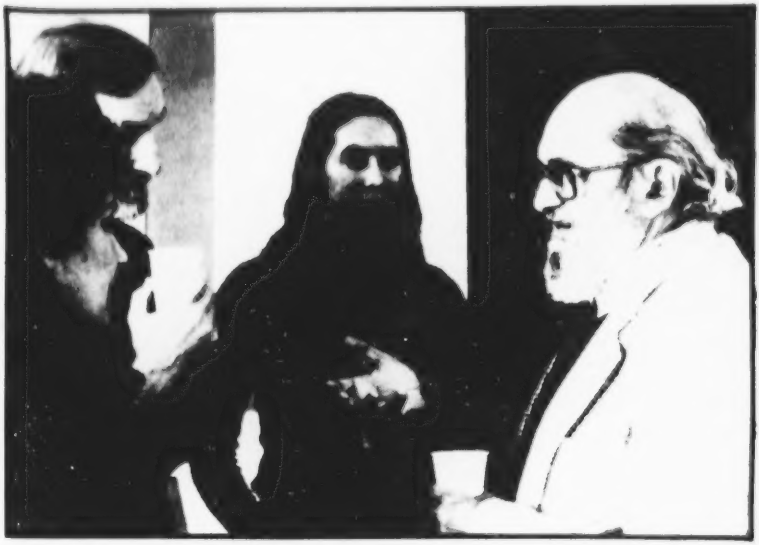
The question for you is to extend in time the existence of the project. This is what I call the dialectical relationship between tactics and strategy. That is, you have to invent tactics in order to go little by little, trying to shape the project, to gain active support of the people without making it so visible that the top sees what you are doing. You see? You have to read Machiavelli (laughter).

You cannot commit too many mistakes in the area of tactics. If you commit lots of mistakes in your tactics, first you are a very bad politician, and you also lose the project. But for me this is a very good opportunity to show how we as we as educators are politicans and not just educators.

I feel so sad concerning the future of these people who teach at universities and think that they are just professors. They don't put their hands into politics because they think that it is dirty. It's precisely in escaping from politics that you have to know that you are a politician, and that your tactics are not merely pedegogical ones. But we cannot escape from this fact that politics and education are interwoven. You must develop your tactics there in response to the situation you confront in the field, not here, in the university, unless you wish to stop the project. In that case you don't need tactics. You could just come back home and leave the project.

You are a proponent of critical, dialogical education, if not in a kind of systematic educational program then in conversations with the participants of this program. I think that it would be interesting to begin to challenge them actively about understanding better the raison d'etre for the reactions of the people at the top. You see, little by little, you could say while eating your soup at the house of one of them, "John, do you know that last night at home before sleep I thought that I should ask you some questions about the reactions of the administrators to our ideas about dialogue? One of the questions was: Is it really that those people don't properly understand what dialogue is or, on the contrary, do they have that negative reaction precisely because they have begun to understand what our project would mean for them?"

Pose this question and then continue eating your soup. Don't demand the answer. It is also our job to do some things without making any kind of demand on the person for an answer. Maybe one must later come and say, "Look, I also thought about that question and this is what I think. . ."



We were attempting to introduce a new idea; "control from below" of a government sponsored program. Such a change was a challenge to the status quo, with possible consequences and danger for those involved. As an outsider, I asked myself the question:

> *Do we have any right to get ourselves involved in a process of transformation in someone else's culture?*

I am sure that this is also a very serious question which should be asked; whether people from one culture should be involved in efforts for social transformation in another culture. The reasons why young people leave the States, or Stockholm, to go to different cultures, I can't exactly say but I have the impression that there are some reasons behind this.

One of them, for example, is that in societies like this we sometimes have the false impression, and it is a very naive understanding, that society is finished, is complete. We have everything. We touch a button and a hand comes and begins doing like that (makes a combing motion) on our heads (laughter). We buy a computer and the computer almost writes the books for us. We have everything. . .

This, however, is not the conviction we have concerning the other world (i.e. the Third World). That world appears like something incomplete. It is in the process of becoming. Sometimes the motivation for wishing to leave the modern technological world is to participate in something which is not yet completed, in the creation of something. I think that this is one of the unconscious reasons. These people need to experience themselves in materially difficult conditions.

But there is also on the other side a certain fatalistic understanding which is behind this, which can be explained like this: Here, in the complex technological world, I have such a lack of power to confront the establishment, to confront the things which are happening here. It is as if all these things can never be changed. We want to have a sense of conviviality [closeness] with the possibility of transformation. In Africa, it's possible to change something. And I think that in Latin America it is possible. Of course, it is also naive to think that change can occur so easily in the Third World.

You must discover that you cannot stop history. You have to know that your country (the US) is one of the greatest problems for the world. You have to discover that you have all these things because of the rest of the world. You must think of these things.

Since you are aware you feel responsible for your country, for changing things inside your country, because you are critical. I don't, however, see why you cannot also go to Africa or Latin America or Asia. The fact of being born here does not prevent you from going to other countries. I don't see why you can't.

Sometimes it is necessary also to learn there because you can learn better there about these relationships than here. It is by discovering The power of imperialism in Latin America that you discover that you are really an imperialist, some times. You have to discover by touching the object of your power sometimes. Then you can come back much more critical, or afraid, or reactionary. It's very good when you go because you have some illusions when you leave here and when you arrive there you discover that really your country is in command of the world. And then you become reactionaries. I love this because at least I know with whom I am talking.

We cannot say that this country (a Third World country) is bad because mine is better. I cannot make judgements about you. I have to understand that a culture is in the process of becoming, and it is just different. I can say that I prefer the way of living in my country.

Secondly, by going to another country it is absolutely necessary for he or she who is going to in some way perform a very difficult exercise, an almost impossible exercise, which is to 'de-knowledge-ize' ourselves. This means to forget the knowledge which we had before and to begin again. But now this time inside of the new cultural frame of reference.

Of course it is impossible in a literal sense because I cannot actually forget knowledge. When I say to forget your previous knowledge it is metaphorical. What it really means is that you must know with the people how and why and in what

fashion they are becoming. But you cannot absolutize this new knowledge in the name of science and then impose it on the people there. That is impossible.

I think that the first thing a person who goes to another culture has to do is to listen to the voice that is speaking. The second thing is to continue to listen. The third thing is to discover that one day, precisely because he or she listened, that it's impossible to talk with someone without listening to that person. If you do you talk above the other person. And talking above others shows arrogance. This is not just a philosophical question.

It is not just an epistemological question. Even though it is also epistemological and philosophical, it is first a political question which requires us to be coexistent with the politics which are behind it. For me, going to Latin America (or the Third World in general) is above all a political act. For me it does not mean that you don't have to go there, or shouldn't. The question is to know how and why to go.

With these questions in mind you enter into a different kind of relationship when you go there. Dialogue is not a kind of chaste event, dialogue makes love every day.

ON FREIRE

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